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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 COLOMBO 000990

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SUBJECT: SRI LANKA: LTTE REFUSES TO MEET GOVERNMENT
DELEGATION IN OSLO, ANGRY GOVERNMENT REACTION TO REPORT BY
CEASEFIRE MONITORS

Classified By: Ambassador Jeffrey J. Lunstead, 1.4(b,d)

¶1. (C) Summary. The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) surprised most observers by derailing diplomatic efforts to salvage the peace process, refusing to hold talks on the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission June 8-9 in Oslo. Moreover, in the wake of the EU listing of the Tigers, the LTTE has said it will refuse to cooperate with the SLMM if it continues to draw monitors from EU member states. Norwegian Ambassador Brattskar told Ambassador that both the LTTE and the Government of Sri Lanka (GSL) are making matters difficult for the facilitators. Chastising statements by the Norwegians and the SLMM have angered the Government of Sri Lanka (GSL) and irritated the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam's (LTTE), highlighting the uncertainty of the continuing roles of facilitators and monitors, and the status of the Ceasefire Agreement (CFA) itself. End summary.

Oslo Non-Event

¶2. (SBU) By all accounts the SLMM talks in Oslo were a non-event, with GSL delegation led by Peace Secretariat head Dr. Palitha Kohona waiting at the table at 8:30 a.m. on June 8 for a no-show LTTE delegation headed by LTTE Political Wing leader S.P. Tamilselvan. Having arrived in Oslo on June 5 ostensibly committed to discuss with the GSL the role of the SLMM, Tamilselvan informed Solheim as the talks were scheduled to begin that his delegation would not sit at the table. The LTTE objected to the lack of Cabinet-level Ministers among the GSL delegation and hence would not sit down directly with the GSL. They said, however, that talks could go on through the Norwegians. The Tigers also told the Norwegians that they would not accept CFA monitors from European Union nations after the EU's listing of the LTTE as a terrorist group.

¶3. (C) Deputy of the GSL Peace Secretariat Ketesh Loganathan told poloff on June 9 that President Rajapaksa ordered the GSL delegation almost immediately to return to Sri Lanka once Kohona informed him of the Tiger's refusal, prompting an ironic complaint from Tamilselvan that the GSL had given up

too quickly. Loganathan added that Foreign Minister Samaraweera would still travel to Oslo by June 14 as scheduled but will not meet with the LTTE there.

¶4. (SBU) Norwegian Minister of Internal Development Eric Solheim addressed a letter to the GSL and LTTE on the afternoon of June 8 asking both parties to answer five questions, including: whether the parties would remain committed to the 2002 CFA, whether they want the SLMM to continue to operate, whether the parties will guarantee the monitors' security, whether they will amend the CFA to enable the SLMM to function, and agree to an implementation period of these amendments within six months. In response, the GSL criticized Norway for allegedly placing the GSL and LTTE on the same footing by asking the LTTE to provide "diplomatic immunity" to CFA monitors, a protocol reserved for sovereign governments.

Norwegians Frustrated

¶5. (C) Ambassador spoke by phone evening of June 11 with Norwegian Ambassador Hans Brattskar, who is still in Norway and will remain there until after Sri Lankan Foreign Minister Mangala Samaraweera's visit to Oslo this week. Brattskar said that the Tigers' refusal to meet with the GSL delegation was a complete surprise, and described as "nonsense" their complaints about the level of the GSL delegation. The delegation memberships had been known for some time, and the Tigers had not expressed any problems. The Tigers had subsequently asked for some high-level meetings with the

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Government of Norway, but they had been told that Norway was "fed up" and there would be no high level meetings. The Tigers would depart shortly for Switzerland and be back in Sri Lanka on June 13. Brattskar said that stories in the Sri Lankan press that the Tigers had used the Oslo visit to meet large numbers of their overseas supporters were wrong.

¶6. (C) Brattskar continued that the big question now is the future of the SLMM. The Tigers were categorical in their refusal of citizens of EU states participating in the SLMM after the EU listing of the LTTE. Norway had argued that SLMM members were there in a personal capacity, not as representatives of their home nations, similar to UN personnel. The Tigers rejected this argument. Norway was refusing to accept the Tiger arguments, giving the LTTE some chance to change their mind. If they did not, Norway hoped the two sides would agree to a transition period for the changeover. Brattskar doubted whether any other nations would want to participate at this point. If only Norway and Iceland participated, things would be very difficult for Norway. The issue would be not only filling the slots, but that the SLMM would be more than ever identified with Norway. The recent appointment of Swedish retired General Henricsson as the first non-Norwegian to head the SLMM was intended precisely to lower the Norwegian pro file.

¶7. (C) Brattskar said they were also having troubles with the GSL, which was putting difficult conditions for the visit of Foreign Minister Samaraweera. Norway had wanted to sign an agreement on scientific exploration of Sri Lanka's continental shelf during the visit. The GSL had demurred because they feared it would upset the JVP. (The JVP and others claim periodically that Norway is interested in Sri Lanka because it covets Sri Lanka's hydrocarbon potential.) He also said that the GSL was "treating Eric Solheim in a shabby way," which he did not want to discuss on the phone. Brattskar summed things up by saying that Norway was "pretty fed up."

Straight from the Tiger's Mouth

¶ 18. (SBU) In a June 10 communique from Oslo (which clearly had been prepared well in advance), the LTTE presented a long list of its grievances. It accused the government of persuading the international community to defame the Tigers, using the international community as an "international safety net against the LTTE" and criticized foreign parties' failure to repudiate this so-called deception. The statement criticized the EU for "accepting this false propaganda, punished the victims of state terror and branded the LTTE as a terrorist organization without considering the realities of the ground situation." The statement further accused the GSL of preparing for a full-scale war.

¶ 19. (SBU) Presumably responding in part to Assistant Secretary Boucher's June 1 public statement differentiating between Tamil grievances and the LTTE, the statement decried "the International Community's recent misguided attempt to differentiate the Tamil Nation from the LTTE, the sole interlocutor of the former in the negotiations, is injurious to the peace process." The LTTE ended their lengthy diatribe by stating that the LTTE "reaffirms" its position that a solution to the decades-long separatist conflict should be based on the "right to self-determination."

Geneva Report: Monitors' Talk Tough

¶ 10. (SBU) In a report released June 10, Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission Head Ulf Henricson criticized the GSL for failing to meet its Geneva I commitment to neutralize armed groups operating in areas it controls, accusing security forces of instead working in cahoots with the Karuna faction. The

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report also blamed the LTTE for increased child recruitment during the reporting period (February 22 to present) and blatant CFA violations, but qualified the escalation of Tiger violence, stating: "The GSL remained unwilling to implement all of its commitments and instead denied even the mere presence of armed groups. SLMM fears that the resumption of attacks against the GSL security forces was the LTTE's way of putting pressure on the GSL."

¶ 11. (SBU) In a response statement of June 10, the GSL questioned the impartiality of the SLMM, calling the Geneva report an "unacceptable and not so subtle attempt to find justification for the LTTE's campaign of terror." Government-owned and nationalist press headlined allegations of SLMM and Norwegian bias June 10-11.

A War By Any Other Name

¶ 12. (SBU) Since the upsurge in violence following the April 7 assassination of would-be Tamil National Alliance (TNA) Member of Parliament Vigneswaran, analysts in the independent press have alleged that "Eelam War IV" has indeed already begun despite the Tigers' lack of official withdrawal from the peace process. Since the Oslo fiasco, killings have continued. On June 9, a family of four, including two young children, were hacked to death and hung in the northwestern district of Mannar. On the same day, an unidentified gunman boarded a passenger bus in the northeastern town of Muttur, fatally shooting a Tamil man and his ten-year-old son. On June 10, an anti-personnel mine blast in Mannar killed a top LTTE commander, Lt. Col. Mahenthir, and three Tiger cadres. The pro-LTTE Tamilnet website alleged that on June 11, a Sri Lanka Army Deep Penetration Unit exploded a claymore mine in an LTTE-controlled area of Muttur, killing several cadres. The SLA and LTTE have accused one another of the killings. Indian Tamil political analyst M.R. Narayan Swami told poloff

on June 12, "Eelam War IV is already underway anyway."

Comment

¶13. (C) Comment. It is not clear what the LTTE hoped to gain by pulling a last minute stunt like this in Oslo. Combined with the criticism in the SLMM report, the LTTE no-show has infuriated the government and presumably made accommodation and compromise even more difficult. Moreover, the Tigers seem to have alienated the Norwegians as well. The ending of the Tigers' "Oslo Communiqu" with its reference to "finding a solution to the Tamil national question based on the realization of its right to self-determination" is ominous since it is essentially a rejection of the political process -- and perhaps a harbinger of a return to open conflict. We will be meeting with the key players over the next few days to get a sense of where to go from here. End comment.

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